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Health Care

Natural Resources



*Representative*

# DAVE ANDERSON

**10th District**

## 1998 Session Preview

*Dear Friends,*

*I'm writing this the day before I leave for the legislative session, and you will probably be reading it when we are a month or so into the session. While in Olympia I will be sharing a house with 40<sup>th</sup> District Representatives Dave Quall of Mount Vernon and Jeff Morris of Sedro Woolley.*

*The thought that comes to mind in reflecting back on the last year since I was sworn in is this: The more you learn, the more you realize how much you don't know. Recently, term limits were ruled unconstitutional. Because of today's number and complexity of issues, I think it was a good thing for the citizens to be able to retain people in Olympia with some background and institutional memory. Learning issues — really knowing and understanding them — takes time. It also takes time to learn to write legislation and develop the savvy to shepherd a bill through all the hurdles to final passage.*

*Many bills and much of the work we do can be classed as common-sense legislation or improvements to existing laws. But some are much more complex, controversial and even divisive. What I hope for in the coming term are good debates on issues, and a minimum of separation and alienation.*

*This is a short legislative session that is scheduled to end about the middle of March. In this non-budgetary year, we'll deal with a supplemental budget of a few hundred million dollars, as opposed to the \$20 billion biennial budget we passed last year.*

*Just as a reminder, my committees are Natural Resources, Health Care, and Agriculture & Ecology, on which I serve as assistant ranking minority member. I also serve on the Wetlands Subcommittee of Land Use & Government Reform, the Endangered Species Task Force, and the Council on Aging.*

*This newsletter contains a brief description of some of the issues I expect will be high on the radar screen. For those who like to follow legislative business on the internet, the House of Representatives' website is <http://leginfo.leg.wa.gov/>. As we did last year, Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Representative Barry Sehlín and I will be meeting every Wednesday morning at 7 a.m. to work on district issues and problems. I invite you to continue keeping me informed of your opinions, interests and ideas throughout the session and the interim.*

*Sincerely,*

**Dave Anderson**

# *Representative* **DAVE ANDERSON**

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

It may be that nothing a government can do is as important as helping citizens to feel safe in their homes, and in society. Two topics, violent crime and drunk drivers, are high on my legislative agenda this year.

In 1997, lawmakers demonstrated bipartisan cooperation by passing the most comprehensive juvenile justice reform in 20 years. This year, we'll call for a continuation of that spirit to fill the remaining gaps in public safety, including stronger prevention of juvenile crime. I support giving judges more discretion in dealing with mentally ill offenders. And I'll work to institute new safeguards in juvenile detention centers and group homes.

I support a recent proposal by Governor Locke to clamp down harder on drunken driving. Legislators I've conferred with expect this to be among the very first bills debated this year. The major recommendations outlined by the Governor suggest that we:

- Lower the blood-alcohol level for establishing the crime of driving under the influence from .10 percent to .08 percent.
- Automatically suspend the licenses and impound the vehicles of drunken drivers.
- Restrict the use of deferred prosecutions.

## **SALMON RECOVERY**

I was part of a group of about 20 legislators who spent several days this fall taking a crash course that could be called Salmon 101. We heard from dozens of speakers, mostly scientists, in order to prepare ourselves to formulate a salmon recovery plan.

It's important that we do formulate such a plan, because if chinook are listed as an endangered species by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the federal government will step in unless we have created a satisfactory recovery plan of our own. They won't have the staff to craft a creative, unique plan for our state, and would



be likely to impose across-the-board fishery closures. It's also a virtual certainty that the NMFS would impose severe restrictions on agriculture, forestry practices, and development that could impact almost every Washington citizen.

The Endangered Species Act is a very tough law, and we've been warned that "happy talk" won't cut it. It's time for us to step forward and provide the leadership needed to recover a thriving salmon population – and that includes providing the necessary funding of the plan we create.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

I have attended a number of meetings of state, county and regional transportation planners and elected officials since taking office. I've listened to hours of testimony and have come to the following conclusions: 1) Many of our roads are in disrepair, unsafe and/or woefully inadequate to carry their loads; 2) the ferries are overcrowded and are going to get MUCH WORSE before they get better; 3) there is a dire need for increased transportation funding; and 4) the only long term, dependable, fair, responsible way to fund these massive needs is through adjusting the user fee we commonly call a gas tax, to give it the buying power it had a decade ago.

Present gas-tax funding revenues have fallen far short of keeping up with inflation. The present 23 cents per gallon would be a 27 cent fee had it been pegged to inflation since 1991, or 37 cents if it had been indexed to inflation since 1969, according to the Washington Institute Foundation and the Department of Transportation. At the same time, highway construction standards have become much more stringent, taking into account environmental and liability considerations, making them more expensive even without considering inflation. And, many cars today generate less tax per mile driven, because they are more fuel-efficient. This is a plus for the environment, yet a factor that must be considered when projecting future transportation revenues. Even if the DOT had no waste and made no bad decisions (which are currently being examined by a legislature directed audit), there isn't enough money available to fund badly needed maintenance and new construction.

I believe other alternatives to a gas-tax adjustment are all flawed in terms of their long-term stability, constitutionality and ability to provide sufficient revenue. I agree with former three-term Republican Governor Dan

# 1998 Session Preview



Evans, who recently said, “Without a gas-tax [increase], the other sources of revenue are probably not sufficient. [T]he effects of inaction by lawmakers don’t occur right away. Those who are in office in a few years are really going to catch hell from the public for what is not being

accomplished now.”

Realizing that this will add varying amounts to the costs of operating a car in Washington State, I will seek to offset this expense by supporting an exemption on the first couple of thousands of dollars in valuation of an automobile for calculating our license tab fee, the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax. I will also support adjusting the depreciation schedule to make it more accurately reflect your car’s value.

## EDUCATION

Our constitution makes support for basic education the “paramount duty” of *state* government. Washington’s projected \$861 million revenue surplus offers a great opportunity to reverse the decline in state funding for public schools and ease some of the pressure on local property-taxpayers. I definitely believe we must stay within the spending lid imposed by Initiative 601, but there is some room within the cap to restore some badly needed education dollars.

What do I mean when I say “badly needed”? Well, consider that this year’s state share of K-12 funding is \$68 per student less than last year, when inflation is considered. By next year, the figure will have fallen to \$261 less than in 1993, when the slide began. I believe the Legislature should honor its constitutional commitment to education, and to our children, by simply restoring per-child educational funding to the level at which it sat in 1993.

As we approach the next century, the need for education is more crucial than ever before. We have established higher academic standards that will be in place by the year 2000. Kids who master the essential learning

requirements contained in these new standards will have the best chances to get the best jobs at the highest incomes. Children who fall behind in school will risk falling behind in life as well – permanently. And in recent tests of 68,000 fourth-graders, we found that only 14 percent met the new standards in reading, writing, math and listening.

Many problems need to be solved, but I believe that first we must address the problem of overcrowded classes if we want Washington’s kids to achieve at higher levels. Only *three states* have more crowded classrooms than we have, and one of them, California, has just launched a bipartisan, \$2 billion effort to reduce class sizes. For our children’s sake, we need to act now.

## ENERGY DEREGULATION

Our state currently enjoys one of the lowest electric rates in the country. California and New York, for example, pay more than twice what we pay for power. Considering this, why would anyone support deregulating this vital industry? Supporters suggest that competition could lower our rates even more, but opponents counter that the only one saving under deregulation will be large industrial users.



I will work to protect residential consumers and their very low energy costs from monied interests that would benefit the most – at consumers’ expense. Any proposed electric deregulation, in my opinion, absolutely must meet these standards:

- Deregulation legislation should not be enacted without extensive public debate. Small consumers — the ordinary citizens who have the most to lose under deregulation — should have a significant role in the process.
- Residential consumers should be charged rates that are the same or lower than what they currently pay.

(continued on pg.4)

- Reliability should be maintained to prevent power outages.
- Any deregulation plan must include extensive efforts to protect consumers from fraud and abusive practices, including new legal protections for consumers and effective consumer education.

## **HUMAN SERVICES**

Even during this short session, two important areas that I would include under the human services heading need to be addressed: assistance for the developmentally disabled, and the rapid growth in the number of citizens needing long-term care.

Funding for those with developmental disabilities is likely to be a hot issue this legislative session. Some of the funds help with Medicaid personal care, which provides assistance to those who need extra help in order to remain at home. The Department of Social and Health Services has determined that this important program is almost \$42 million underfunded this year. I'm supporting Governor Locke's supplemental budget request to restore \$41 million in funding.

As for long-term care, I'm afraid the two-year state budget written in 1997 underestimated the numbers of people who would be applying for assistance in long-term care in their homes or community. This number was predicted to grow by 182 clients a month statewide, but the actual caseload growth has averaged 269 a month. We face a serious funding gap.

Serving on the Health Care Committee and the Council on Aging, I've learned how valuable it is to many marginally disabled seniors to be able to stay in their homes as long as possible. Home care is also much more economical than the costs involved in moving into a nursing home. To help preserve home and community care alternatives to nursing-home care, I believe we need to fill the budget void that is currently growing by nearly 90 clients a month, with no end in sight.



THESE ARE JUST A FEW of the topics that I believe should and will come before us in the next 60 days. From what I've been told by lawmakers who have served longer than I, this may be the busiest two months of my life. I think that's as it should be; I'm here to represent you, and to work as hard as I can to do the best possible job. I again invite you to contact me with your questions, comments and advice.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Dave Anderson".